

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BEIRUT 00722 171545Z
ACTION NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W
-----171555 079849 /47

O R 171507Z FEB 77
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 3092

S E C R E T BEIRUT 0722

EXDIS TREAT AS NODIS

FOR THE SECRETARY

FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: OVIP (VANCE, CYRUS)
SUBJECT: SOUTH LEBANON: TALK WITH KAMAL AL-ASSAD, SPEAKER OF
LEBANESE PARLIAMENT

1. SUMMARY: FOLLOWING MESSAGE IS BRIEF ACCOUNT OF EXCHANGE
BETWEEN AMBASSADOR AND SPEAKER OF LEBANESE PARLIAMENT REGARDING
SITUATION IN SOUTHERN LEBANON, WHERE ANARCHY STILL PREVAILS.
SPEAKER HAD NOTHING NEW TO SAY, BUT HIS REMARKS REPORTED TO
GIVE SECRETARY FEELING FOR LOCAL ATMOSPHERE ON THIS QUESTION,
WHICH LEBANESE WILL PROBABLY RAISE WITH HIM. END SUMMARY.

2. I CALLED ON SPEAKER OF LEBANESE PARLIAMENT KAMAL ASSAD THIS
MORNING. HE AND PARLIAMENT TEMPORARILY HOUSED IN LARGE PRIVATE
VILLA NEAR FORMER CONFRONTATION LINE ACROSS FROM FRENCH EMBASSY
RESIDENCE. ASSAD IS SON OF PROMINENT SHI'A FAMILY OF SOUTH LEBANON
WHO HAS FRITTERED AWAY MUCH OF HIS POLITICAL PATRIMONY BUT
REMAINS IMPORTANT LEADER IN HIS OWN TERRITORY. IT IS INDICATIVE
OF PRESENT STATE OF AFFAIRS IN LEBANON, HOWEVER, THAT HE IS
UNABLE TO GO THERE. HIS TWO HOUSES AT TAIBE AND NABATIYAH HAVE
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BOTH BEEN DESTROYED, AND LEFTIST AND PALESTINIAN ELEMENTS CON-
TROLLING AREA HAVE THREATENED KILL HIM IF HE RETURNS.

3. AL ASSAD SPOKE AT SOME LENGTH ABOUT ANARCHY IN THE SOUTH
IN SAME TERMS HE USED WITH AMBASSADOR PICKERING ON JAN 20, 1977.
HE SAID PRESENT SITUATION WAS SERVING NO ONE'S INTEREST.
ORDER MUST BE RESTORED TO THE AREA FOR SAKE NOT ONLY OF INTERNAL

STABILITY IN LEBANON BUT ALSO FOR STABILITY OF REGION. FOR ISRAELIS TO TALK OF LEBANESE MILITARY FORCES ASSUMING CONTROL WAS FUTILE. THERE WAS NO LEBANESE ARMY TODAY AND THERE WOULD NOT BE ONE CAPABLE OF ASSERTING AUTHORITY IN THAT REGION BEFORE ANOTHER TWO YEARS. AT THE MOMENT THERE WAS ONLY ONE APPARENT SOLUTION, AND THAT WAS TO LET THE ARAB DETERRENT FORCE MOVE IN AND ASSUME CONTROL. ARAB STATES HAD NO INTENTION OF LAUNCHING WAR AGAINST ISRAEL, AND ISRAELI FEARS REGARDING SYRIAN PRESENCE WERE NOT JUSTIFIED MILITARILY.

4. IF SOLUTION UNACCEPTABLE TO ISRAELIS, THEY SHOULD PROPOSE ANOTHER, AND THEY SHOULD PROPOSE ONE THAT MADE SOME SENSE. PERHAPS UNITED NATIONS FORCE COULD BE CONSTITUTED. HE DID NOT KNOW. THE IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION WAS THAT SOME WAY OUT OF THE PRESENT IMPASSE BE FOUND.

5. IN MEANTIME, HE SAID, PEOPLE IN THE AREA WERE INCREASINGLY CONCERNED ABOUT ISRAELI INTENTIONS. NO SOONER HAD SYRIANS WITHDRAWN FROM NABATIYAH UNDER PRESSURE FROM UNITED STATES THAN ISRAELIS BEGAN LOBBING SHELLS INTO THE TOWN. PEOPLE HAD FLED IN PANIC AND THERE HAD BEEN AN EXODUS FROM NABATIYAH TO BEIRUT. SITUATION WAS INTOLERABLE. SINCE UNITED STATES BORE AT LEAST 80 PERCENT OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PROBLEM, IT SHOULD HELP LEBANESE FIND SOLUTION.

6. I SAID I ASSUMED HE HAD SEEN YOUR REMARKS PRIOR TO DEPARTURE FROM WASHINGTON AFFIRMING OUR BELIEF LEBANESE GOVT MUST EXERT CONTROL OVER THIS PORTION OF ITS TERRITORY BUT RECOGNIZING THAT IT LACKED FORCES TO DO IT. WE WELL AWARE OF DANGER POSED BY
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PRESENT SITUATION AND OF NEED TO FIND SOLUTION. FRANKLY, I DID NOT KNOW WHAT THAT SOLUTION WAS. ISRAELI APPREHENSIONS REGARDING SYRIA WERE REAL, AND LAST WEEK WE HAD HAD REASON TO BELIEVE THEY WERE INDEED MAKING PREPARATIONS TO REACT MILITARILY. SOME ARRANGEMENT MUST BE FOUND WHICH WOULD ANSWER THEIR CONCERNS AS WELL AS LEBANESE. CONCLUDED THAT I WOULD TRANSMIT HIS COMMENTS TO YOU AND TO DEPARTMENT, AND HE COULD BE SURE THEY WOULD RECEIVE FULL ATTENTION. (ASSAD HAD EARLIER EXPRESSED HOPE YOU WOULD CALL AT PARLIAMENT AS GUIRINGAUD WAS DOING RIGHT AFTER ME THIS MORNING. I HAD EXPLAINED THERE WAS NOT TIME AND OFFERED TO TRANSMIT ANY MESSAGE HE MIGHT HAVE.)

7. COMMENT: HAVE HAD HEAVY EXPOSURE TO PERSONALITIES FROM THE SOUTH IN PAST 24 HOURS. HAD MAMMOTH LUNCH YESTERDAY AT HOME OF RAFIC CHAHINE, DEPUTY FOR NABATIYA. AMONG GUESTS WERE TWO OF THE KHALILS, WHO USED TO BE THE LORDS OF TYRE. THEY SAID THEIR TOWN HAD BEEN TAKEN OVER BY COMMUNISTS AND BAATHIS AND THEY DARED NOT GO BACK. TALES OF MURDER AND RAPINE ABOUND. ONE OF MY INTERLOCUTORS WENT SO FAR AS TO ASK WHY ISRAELIS DID NOT MOVE IN

AND CLEAN UP SITUATION. AM TOLD THIS IS A QUESTION COMMONLY PUT BY PEOPLE FROM THAT AREA, AND IT ILLUSTRATES EXTENT OF THEIR DESPAIR.

8. THE SOUTH WILL BE ON THE LEBANESE AGENDA WHEN YOU ARRIVE TOMORROW. WHILE YOUR STATEMENT REFERRED TO ABOVE HAS BEEN FAVORABLY RECEIVED AND GIVEN CONSIDERABLE COMFORT TO GOL, THEY NEED TO SHOW SOME PROGRESS TOWARDS REASSERTION LEBANESE AUTHORITY OVER AREA IN QUESTION.

9. THERE ARE TWO THEORETICAL ALTERNATIVES AVAILABLE: (A) LETTING ANARCHY CONTINUE IN HOPE SITUATION WILL TAKE CARE OF ITSELF; (B) TRYING TO DO SOMETHING POSITIVE, SUCH AS SEEKING AGREEMENT ON SENDING IN DENATURED ARAB DETERRENT FORCE, I.E., ONE WHICH IS NOT SYRIAN, OR CONSTITUTING ANOTHER UNEF FOR AREA. OF THESE, IT SEEMS TO ME (B) IS PREFERABLE. ALTERNATIVE (A) RISKS LETTING BOIL FESTER UNTIL IT EXPLODES. I DON'T THINK WE CAN AFFORD THAT.

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10. MY DCM, GEORGE LANE, WILL BE AVAILABLE TO BRIEF YOU ON THIS SUBJECT ON YOUR FLIGHT FROM CAIRO. HE KNOWS IT MUCH BETTER THAN I. PARKER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL STABILITY, BRIEFING MATERIALS, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, POLITICAL SITUATION, ANARCHY, CAT-B
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 17-Feb-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 22 May 2009
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977BEIRUT00722
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: P840084-2119, N770001-0584
Format: TEL
From: BEIRUT
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770233/aaaabdjn.tel
Line Count: 143
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 92d5a1c5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NODS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21-Jan-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3301243
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SOUTH LEBANON: TALK WITH KAMAL AL-ASSAD, SPEAKER OF LEBANESE PARLIAMENT
TAGS: OVIP, OGEN, IS, SY, LE, (VANCE, CYRUS R)
To: STATE SS MULTIPLE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/92d5a1c5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009